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OUR RESPONSE TO THE ENTHUSIASMS OF THE SPIRIT.

A SERMON PREACHED IN THE SOUTH
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, OF NEW
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OF NOVEMBER, 1904, BY THE PASTOR,
REV. OZORA S. DAVIS.

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*"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying,
Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?
Then said I, Here am I; send me."*

Isaiah vi:8.

There are holy times when the soul is tuned and quivering to the winds of God. These are the critical moments of life. Then we are made or undone as children of the Father. The splendors of earth lie tarnished and tumbled before us; the king in his glory is dead. The richer splendors of the God victorious over human disaster unroll before us. Then we stand face to face with reality and opportunity. The enthusiasm of the spirit waits its natal hour in the soul. What of the soul's response? Duty and destiny are determined by the way in which we answer the enthusiasms of the spirit.

I have said "enthusiasms"; and before I go farther let me attempt to rescue that word from a certain suspicion and reproach which it has gathered to itself in your thinking. "Enthusiasm!" We have been taught to be very careful about that. Enthusiasm is so rash, so headstrong, so careless of consequence! It has made so many

blunders, wrought such havoc in ancient traditions, and left so many dead on the field where it has dared to lead charges contrary to the counsels of the prudent! Were it not better to use some other word for this something that was astir in the very depths of the young Isaiah's being, and is astir in the life of to-day as it never has been before? No, I think not. This word enthusiasm is a very sacred word when we come to understand just what its content really is. We must seek its meaning far back in the springs of Greek poetry. There we read of men and women who were possessed by a divinity—in them a god spoke and moved—they were enthusiasts. This is the primal content of the term. It represents the human spirit in its loftiest moods; it stands for a man at his best. God is energetic in the enthusiast; enthusiasm is divine movement within the ranges of the human spirit. If it has shattered human traditions, it is because the divine was no longer in them. If it has propelled men to die with seeming rashness, it is because this central passion is greater and holier and far more worth the saving than the earthly life of any human spirit. Enthusiasm is simply divine passion moving in human endeavor. It is the saving force energetic in modern life. I am

convinced that even the material world itself will be construed ultimately in the terms of centers of enthusiasm rather than in the terms of material atoms. Indeed, the material construction is fast passing away if it is not already gone.

We need this divine possession of the soul to-day in the whole sphere of our living. Not machinery, not money, not organization; but life, passion, possession, divine in source, in control, and in direction—oh, that is what our modern world, standing in the temple where the angels are even now singing their *Thrice-Holy*, must have! It is the new ideal, the greater consecration, to which we are called to-day. The sounds of the divine inquiry are all about us; “whom shall I send and who will go for us?”

To man in his economic distress—to this young giant, suddenly awakened, half-staggering yet between his slumber, still heavy, and his growing consciousness of strength—who shall go to modern industry with words of sane counsel and hands outreached in genuine helpfulness?

No amount of academic theorizing will answer. The industrial revolution, out of the thick of which we are not yet wholly come, cannot be understood by those who speculate regarding the action, under any set of conditions, of an

“economic man.” No scheme of mechanical adjustment yet brought to light is adequate. The program of the agitator does not reach to the limits of the problem. There must be a prophet’s vision and a lover’s zeal for this great problem of economic justice and good-will. Shortening hours, increasing pay, sharing profits—all these are devices of expediency. The vision to see the essential relationships between labor and capital; the love that shall bind them both together—these are the true solvents. These, however, are the product of human enthusiasm. Nothing less than the genius of such insight and devotion will rise to the level of social politics. The economic problem will be solved by men, not by schemes. Human brotherhood must become a reality through human service. It will be men going for God, men sent by the divine to the human, men possessed by the enthusiasm of Christ—it will be these alone who will solve the industrial problem and reconstruct the social order in the terms of love and fraternity.

To man, in his social and moral stress, to humanity seeking new institutions and confused and baffled in the search, who will go, and whom can God send?

Once more it is not a matter of changes in social conditions which concerns us. We are all grown somewhat perplexed by this battling from one side to the other of the questions of environment and personality as determinant forces. Why not cease trying to eliminate either term of our proposition? Of course the conditions by which a person is surrounded enter into the formation of character. Most sure it also is that a man by sheer force of personality ever transforms and creates his environment. Both facts are essential. For moral transformation we do not need external changes primarily; we need inner renewals. It is a man breathing the very spirit of God who must go to-day into the thick of the fight for social righteousness.

In the last interview which Dr. Steiner had with Tolstoi, the great man said:

"The Kingdom of God is within you, and you are to be the pattern after which the kingdom of this world is to fashion itself. Young man, you sweat too much blood for the world; sweat some for yourself first. You cannot make the world better till you are better." ("Tolstoi the Man," 309.)

That is profound insight. The fundamental problem for you and me is that of personal en-

thusiasm, of our own possession by the Kingdom of God ere we go out to construct the Kingdom of God among men. We cannot make the world better till we are better. Jesus did not propose a new politics for His countrymen; He did not attempt a new social structure; He never destroyed the moral system of His time save as He transcended it. He lived a life, impressed His soul, gave Himself, transmitted an enthusiasm. On this He rested the future of His Kingdom upon the earth. The modern age, in its moral uncertainty, waits for exactly this revelation. It must be personal with us. We can make the world better only by becoming better ourselves.

To man in his spiritual darkness and misfortune, to the yearning, aspiring, struggling human spirit, with its holy hungers and its ceaseless outreach for light and strength, who will go and whom can God send?

Once more, no dead, impersonal set of doctrines can save this living humanity. Why offer the man who seeks for bread a stone any longer?

Men are not looking to the churches now to see the exact content of their creeds; they are gazing with eager eyes to discover what the church has experienced, what it feels and knows

and realizes. The enthusiasms of the Christian people are the new defense of the Christian faith. The modern world is somewhat in the dark about the abstract terms of theology; but it understands love and sacrifice and honesty and faith. If you will study what Jesus said about the final judgment you will be impressed by the universal comprehensiveness of its canons. Helping a poor man, caring for a sick man, encouraging a defeated man—every living being knows without being told what that means. It means love and faith and courage and enthusiasm. It means a living man, possessed by God, doing something to clear up spiritual darkness and dread. Those are the canons of the last assize.

I am anxious to say no word that will convey any sense of slighting the venerable and the necessary creeds and institutions through which the divine life has expressed itself in the past. But the need of to-day is for something deeper than this; it is for vision, it is for insight, it is for passion. We must have God-possessed men; but not in places of isolation, not in cells and monasteries. We must have God-possessed men side by side with their fellows in the world's markets, in the factories, in the heat and heart of the struggle. Who tells us that God's voice can-

not be heard in the hum of the world's work? Would he have us then forget that the hum of the world's work is also the voice of God? The word that finds response to-day is the word of passionate enthusiasm. It is sometimes rash and it sometimes loses balance; but it goes to the point and it wins the soul.

In the Des Moines "Register and Leader" of October 21, 1904, there was an editorial in which the writer defines the peculiar personal power of Dr. Hillis.

"Dr. Hillis is in one important and vital particular much more logically the successor of Henry Ward Beecher than Dr. Abbott, in that he possesses spiritual insight—that peculiar faculty that inspires true eloquence, eloquence being an appeal to man's consciousness and moral sense, through intuition rather than through reason. Dr. Hillis at his best knocks at the innermost door and issues the irresistible call, just as Beecher at his best did, while the theologians, and arguers and debaters are on the sidewalk discussing whether they are at the right house."

Concerning the comparative judgment here expressed I have nothing to say; but I do like that strong figure. The man of enthusiasm has already found the door, knocked, and delivered

his message, while the man of caution and prudence is standing without on the sidewalk, wondering if he is before the right house. Insight and enthusiasm are needed in giving the message to the spirit of man, from the Spirit of God.

Thus I have outlined three avenues of mission which, I think, the times demand that we Christian people rise and run upon. To man in his economic stress, in his moral perplexity and in his spiritual darkness, who will go for God?

The crux of the problem which the text presents is not the question, it is the reply. The heroism of the text lies in the young Isaiah's answer to the call of the God of service.

This is the point which I must make most emphatic. The soul of the young man answered the call of the Divine.

If there is one paramount source of disheartenment for us to-day it is this, the lethargy and indifference of the human spirit in the presence of the problems of the day and the calls of our Christ to serve them. The saddest words I hear are not, "It might have been." The saddest words I hear are these, "Let well enough alone; I do not care." It is before this mood that I stand in despair. All the clarion notes of duty sounded in vain; all the divine incentives

proffered without response; our dull clay not moved upon by the creative spirit because we will not answer its touch—oh, this indifference, this listlessness, this selfish, reprehensible carelessness—this is the most solemn and serious indictment of our Christianity to-day!

This is a matter in which we must deal with our own souls frankly. You may not hear the call of the Christ of to-day so clearly as another person may hear it; but you cannot, you certainly cannot, fail to be conscious of it to some slight degree. I am not wrong in assuming that just now every one of us in this room is conscious of a call to us, personally, for service to the social or moral or spiritual need of life somewhere. We cannot delegate it; we cannot hire another man to do it for us. The shame of our modern failure is just here; we put our contribution with smug content into the envelope and think we are so wholly Christian because we have helped send our minister and our missionary in our stead. The gift is good, indeed. The only difficulty with our giving is that it does not go deep enough. Not one in fifty of us gives to the limit of real sacrifice. The gift cannot take the place of personal service—this is the point which I wish to make. You must complete the donation

in the envelope by the gift of yourself. Nothing less will serve the Kingdom of our Christ.

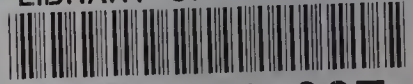
The new day is dawning, unless the signs along the horizon fail the watcher on the walls. Its watchword is not mechanical methods of charity, or formal services of ritual and worship, or salvation by delegated missionaries. If I read the signs truly, this new day is even now calling for the dedication of manhood to the needs of man in the spirit of the great brother, Christ; for the personal service of neighbor to neighbor after the manner of the Master's parable of the Good Samaritan. Its call is the call of the text—not what new method, what new organization, what new device—but “Who will go?” that is, what new person will give himself even here in loving dedication to this new personal saving force of the Kingdom now coming among men?

At the last analysis, therefore, my text is not the record of a heroic episode in a young man's life. It is no unknown and far-off prophet who stands in the presence of the unspeakable glory and hears with ravished soul the songs of the seraphim crying “holy.” It is yourself, it is I, who, in this holy temple, where God is being unveiled even in the Autumn's glory and the beat of hammers and the throng of living men, stand

upon our feet and hear, unless we stop our ears, the very Infinite uttering itself, "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" It is the enthusiasm of the Spirit. A nobler day never dawned for man than this; the holy city is descending; brotherhood is making progress; all the cry about a Godless world is false. God is here; this Spirit over us is the Spirit of God. What shall our answer be? What can it be less than this, as, in a new consecration, as persons and as churches, we bow our ready hearts and say, "Here am I; send me."

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